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E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/25/2017
TAGS: PHUM PGOV PREL KIRF EG
SUBJECT: STATE SECURITY RESPONDS TO REPORTED MISTREATMENT
OF CHRISTIAN CONVERT

REF: A. HANFORD-STEWART TELCON 7/18/2007
 **1B. HANFORD-STEWART-RICCIARDONE TELCONS 7/23/2007
 1C. HANFORD-RICCIARDONE E-MAIL 7/24/2007**

Classified by Ambassador Francis Ricciardone for reasons 1.4
(b) and (d)

11. (C) Summary: State Security Investigations Service (SSIS) Brigadier General Mohamed Youssef told A/Polcouns that Egyptian security personnel had not/not mistreated Muslim-born convert to Christianity Shaymaa Mohamed El-Sayed during her July 16-23 detention and that, upon her release from police custody, she had gone willingly with her Muslim father and brother. Youssef said the Shaymaa controversy is connected to a "family dispute." We reminded Youssef that the USG, including Congress, paid close attention to reported abuses of religious freedom and human rights in Egypt. We pressed Youssef for access by an Embassy officer to Shaymaa; Youssef voiced no direct objection, but observed that the woman's family might be reluctant to allow her to meet with an Embassy officer. We will continue to seek contact with Shaymaa to obtain her version of events. End summary.

12. (SBU) Drawing on information provided by DRL/IRF to post (refs), we contacted senior officials in the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Interior on July 19 to register USG concerns about the Shaymaa case. As reported by the Christian advocacy group Compass Direct in press releases on July 18 and 23, Shaymaa (AKA Eman) Mohamed El-Sayed is a 26-year-old Alexandria woman. Compass Direct alleges that her conversion to Christianity from Islam in 2003 led to a series of events that eventually resulted in her detention and torture by Egyptian police July 16-23. Compass Direct further reports that the police released her into the custody of her Muslim family on July 23, and that family members are continuing to abuse her. The Compass Direct press releases are based on the accounts of unidentified "eyewitnesses." DRL/IRF reports that the information regarding the alleged mistreatment of Shaymaa is "accurate" and "extremely reliable."

13. (C) Brigadier Youssef, the senior SSIS officer responsible for liaison with foreign embassies, invited A/Polcouns to his Ministry of Interior office in Cairo on July 25 to discuss the Shaymaa case. Youssef, who was joined by four other SSIS officers, confirmed that Alexandria police have several open investigations involving Shaymaa, including a 2003 missing persons report filed by her family and a 2004 fraudulent identity documents charge, related to her apparent purchase of a fake national ID card. (Note: The GOE bureaucracy, which requires citizens to list their faith on ID cards, generally refuses to recognize citizens' claims that they have converted from Islam to Christianity. Muslim-born converts to Christianity in Egypt sometimes choose to procure fraudulent ID cards reflecting their new faith. End note.) Youssef said that police in Alexandria detained Shaymaa on July 16 in connection with the open investigation into her alleged fake ID card. He did not

provide details on the decision to release Shaymaa on July 23.

¶4. (C) Brigadier Youssef denied the Compass Direct allegations that Shaymaa suffered abuse at the hands of the Egyptian security services. He also said that she had gone willingly and without fear when the police had concluded that she could be released. We reminded Youssef that the USG places high priority on protecting and advocating human rights and religious freedom, and asked Youssef for his views on the possibility of arranging a meeting between Shaymaa and an Embassy officer. Youssef said that he thought that the family would object to such a meeting, on the grounds that they would suspect the Embassy of bias, and that he had reservations about SSIS brokering such a meeting, but that he would make the necessary inquiries. Youssef said he would not object to us trying to meet Shaymaa independently.

¶5. (C) Comment: The GOE has clearly registered our concern about the Shaymaa case. Youssef's willingness to engage with us on the details of the Shaymaa case, and his invitation to us to raise other cases of concern in future, are welcome developments. Without access to the sources for the Compass Direct press releases, or to Shaymaa herself, it remains difficult to judge the competing versions of events in the Shaymaa case. We will continue to seek to meet with Shaymaa herself or other witnesses.

RICCIARDONE